



Quarterly Report: April 1 to June 30, 2005

ARMENIA: POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENT AND ELECTION MONITORING

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I. SUMMARY

Political parties have yet to gain traction as meaningful players in Armenian politics. A politically active military, a weak legislature and a series of flawed elections have prevented parties from gaining influence over the government. Party leaders, however, have harmed their own cause by not reaching out to the citizenry. Prompted largely by parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007 and 2008, respectively, the previously static political environment now appears to be providing new opportunities for parties to organize. A constitutional referendum and local elections this fall offer immediate occasions for party activism.

In this quarter, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) challenged Armenian party leaders to take advantage of these opportunities by reaching out to voters and building bases of support among disparate constituencies. NDI provided advice and training to both pro-government and opposition political party leaders, staff, and activists. NDI's work with party leaders focused on helping them develop policies on membership, internal capacity development, and communications.

NDI also continued to support a political discussion club, which, in this quarter, held public discussions of the constitutional reform process, the new electoral code, and likelihood of the president seeking a third successive term in office.

In cooperation with ABA/CEELI and the Armenian Legislative Strengthening Project, NDI organized a series of meetings with a group of Armenian NGOs aimed at increasing citizen participation in the constitutional amendment process. NDI also arranged meetings for this group with members of parliament.

The Institute provided advice and support to its civic partner, It's Your Choice (IYC), during the quarter. In particular, NDI helped IYC implement a separately funded advanced training of trainers program for its most capable election monitors. NDI also helped IYC develop and launch a website that houses its election reports and advocacy documents in both Armenian and English. IYC made progress in establishing a board of directors.

II. BACKGROUND

Since independence in 1991, Armenia's political parties have failed to become influential actors in political life. Fraudulent elections and the concentration of authority in the executive branch of government have also made it difficult for the legislative branch to influence government policy. The current regime suffers from accusations of illegitimacy, which, coupled with growing economic dissatisfaction, has left it vulnerable to popular unrest. In April 2004, opposition forces united and staged rallies calling for the president's removal. A violent crackdown resulted in scores injured, hundreds arrested, and the seizure of opposition party offices. Political tensions remain high.

The challenges to promoting pluralism in Armenia are compounded by opposition party leaders' reluctance to reach beyond Yerevan and immerse themselves in grassroots politics, and their unwillingness to reach out to women and to Armenia's youth. They believe that the next elections will be manipulated by the presidential administration, as in the past. This has led them to pursue confrontation with the government rather than build political parties.

NDI began assisting political parties in Armenia in 1995. Since then, the Institute has worked with parties on creating organizational structures, establishing coalitions, organizing for elections, and engaging in community outreach. As a result, thousands of Armenian party activists have gained valuable skills, even as the parties to which they belong have failed to establish themselves as meaningful players. The Institute has longstanding ties to Armenia's opposition groups, which fall into two alliances in the national parliament, the Justice Coalition and National Unity. Over the past year, NDI has also cultivated a relationship with the three governing coalition parties, the Republican Party, the Legal State Party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (the *Dashnaks*). Although they are allied, these pro-government groups are quietly seeking to differentiate themselves from one another for future elections. NDI has consulted and trained senior party leaders from all these groups.

In 1996, NDI helped to establish IYC, a coalition of Armenian NGOs. IYC has provided voter education, created forums for citizens to participate in local government, recruited and trained election monitors, and monitored national elections. With staff in each of Armenia's 11 *marzes* and over 4,000 volunteers across the country, IYC's election monitoring programs have grown stronger over the years, and its non-election work has expanded to include organizing national and regional advocacy campaigns, and civic education programs. IYC has become the largest volunteer civic organization in Armenia and the nation's leading authority on elections and citizen participation in government.

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

In this quarter, NDI sought to:

- strengthen the capacity of parties to participate effectively in local elections;
- increase IYC's capacity to educate citizens and monitor proficiently the referendum and local election procedures; and
- increase IYC's future sustainability.

IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

NDI conducted activities to:

- assist parties in developing policies on membership, internal capacity development, and leveraging outside assistance;
- engage political parties in broad grassroots voter identification programs;
- assist in the development of intra-party elected women's organizations to advocate for increased involvement of women in the party as a whole;
- monitor the voting process during the constitutional referendum, selected local elections and parliamentary by-elections; and
- increase the capacity of IYC to monitor the transparency of the parliament and local governments.

Political Party Programming

Training for Government Parties

In this quarter, NDI expanded its work with the Republican Party, which holds the largest number of seats in parliament and leads the ruling coalition. NDI and Samvel Nikoyan, a member of parliament and a party board member, held a number of discussions about the challenges the party is facing as incumbents. NDI explained that being the majority party makes it impossible to credibly distance itself from the administration's unpopular policies. Thus, it would be best to highlight administration successes and seek to persuade voters that its agenda is leading to positive change.

The Institute and Armen Ashotoyan, a recently seated member of parliament and the leader of the party's youth wing, organized a training session on campaign tactics in June for 52 members of the youth wing. The session focused on low cost voter outreach methods. The youth wing plans to focus on electing its current and former members to municipal posts this fall.

Artur Baghdasaryan, the speaker of the parliament and the leader of the Legal State Party (*Orinats Yerkir*), asked NDI to conduct a training sessions on external communications, press relations, fundraising, and developing campaign structures ahead of the 2007-2008 election cycles. The party's leadership, including the speaker, the faction chief, a parliamentary committee chair, and two other members of parliament, participated in a session in mid-June on communications. The session included an intensive media simulation that NDI designed in cooperation with Internews. Each of the participants received a DVD of their performance(s) included critiques and suggestions.

Throughout the quarter, the party implemented a plan with NDI advice to increase the power of local branch leaders. The speaker asked NDI to conduct an assessment of the party's branch offices and provide suggestions on how to improve implementation of organizational reform. NDI met with branch leaders throughout Armenia and found a high degree of activity.

NDI advised the speaker that although branches were conducting many activities, the branch leaders remained reluctant to take independent decisions on non-administrative matters. To overcome this problem, NDI and the party's leadership designed a branch leadership training program that will take place in the next quarter.

NDI also advised the speaker on ways to build a more professional staff. As a result, the speaker hired a research coordinator to draft briefing notes and speeches. He also hired a press secretary to coordinate media relations. In June, after extensive consultations with the Institute, the party held its first public fundraising event. More than 1,200 people attended and the party raised over U.S. \$100,000.

The new leaders of the Armenian Revolutionary Front (the *Dashnaks*) asked NDI to train the members of its women's branch and its candidates for local elections. These are planned for the next quarter. NDI organized a roundtable for the party's leadership with senior members of the diplomatic corps to discuss the party's policies and its plans.

Training for Opposition Parties

In this quarter, NDI advised and trained the key parties that make up the Justice Coalition on strengthening branch offices, using the media and other external communications, contacting voters directly, and influencing the constitutional reform process.

NDI conducted training sessions for branch office directors from the People's Party of Armenia's (PPA), the Liberal Ramkavar Party, and the Heritage Party. Twenty-five PPA branch leaders from across the country participated in sessions in April and June that were focused on membership recruitment and party mobilization. In May, NDI conducted a similar training program for the Alaverdi staff of the Liberal Ramkavar Party. In meetings throughout the quarter with Raffi Hovannissian, the leader of the reemerging Heritage Party, NDI provided advice on the best ways to develop regional branch offices.

NDI provided media training to the PPA, the Heritage Party, and the Union of Constitutional Rights Party (UCRP). With NDI's help, the PPA created a proper press room, an important step forward toward developing a comprehensive media strategy. NDI advised the Heritage Party's campaign staff on using direct mail to recruit new members and conduct campaigns. As the party planned its first congress in May, NDI provided advice on ways to generate media exposure of the event. NDI advised Hrant Khachatryan, the leader of the UCRP, on using the party's newspaper to recruit new members. Mr. Khachatryan and NDI also planned a training session on press relations for key party staff that will occur in August.

The revived Armenian National Movement (ANM) and the National Democratic Union (NDU) requested NDI's assistance in developing plans to influence the constitutional reform process. NDI conducted two planning sessions for 20 ANM leaders in May and June that resulted in the development of a strategic plan. Vazgen Manukyan, the leader of the NDU, also sought NDI's advice on ways to affect the process. NDI suggested that the party issue statements, publish opinion pieces, and participate in public debates on the subject.

During the quarter, NDI continued a voter contact training of trainers program for the Republic Party. More than 65 party activists, including a cross section of youth and women, participated. The sessions culminated with voter outreach activities that required the participants to knock on doors and speak with people in targeted neighborhoods. This resulted in more than 1,200 contacts being made and a high level of enthusiasm as the training moved to a session in June for branch office directors on membership recruitment and organizational development.

NDI met the leaders of the new Ecological Party of Armenia and provided advice on preparing a platform based on environmental conservation and building name recognition and public awareness of their party.

Global Action Plan for Women's Involvement

In this quarter, NDI launched its Win With Women Global Action Plan in Armenia. More than 1,000 copies of its press release were distributed to government officials, political party leaders, NGO leaders, and leaders of international organizations and diplomatic missions. NDI explained the Action Plan to party leaders and asked that they sign on. In the next quarter, the Institute will conduct an assessment of the participating parties to develop a baseline for measuring progress.

NDI also conducted a training session for the managers of the PPA's Women's Center in Alaverdi, which opened in May. The center is supported by the Swedish Liberal Party and serves the party by conducting voter outreach and women's support activities. NDI's training program focused on how to identify potential supporters by creating and managing a voter database.

Support for the Political Discussion Club

In 2003, NDI organized a group of politicians, media representatives, and scholars to hold regular discussions on national issues. This group became known as the Political Discussion Club (PDC). It is now one of the only public forums in which government and opposition leaders debate each other. During this quarter, the club organized three public debates that brought together members of the government, opposition activists, and journalists.

The first discussion focused on regional co-operation and featured Hmayak Hovhannisyan, a member of parliament. Vache Gabrielyan of the Central Bank of Armenia and Eduard Aghajanov, a leading economist, led a discussion on the economy and fiscal policy. Hrayr Karapetyan, a member of parliament from the Dashnak party, and Grigor Ghonjeyan, a member of parliament from the United Labor Party led a discussion on dual citizenship.

NDI helped the PDC produce materials for participants and journalists, which are available on its website (www.pdc.am).

Civic Programming

Increase IYC's capacity to educate citizens about the constitutional referendum process and monitor the referendum

NDI, ABA/CEELI, and the Armenian Legislative Strengthening Project worked together to increase public participation in the referendum process by organizing meetings among a group of Armenian NGOs, which includes IYC, that calls itself the Civil Society Initiative for Constitutional Reform (CSICR). IYC played a leading role in CSICR by advocating for constitutional amendments that would strengthen democratic institutions in Armenia.

CSICR also advocated for public participation in the process of developing amendments. CSICR helped its members attend parliamentary committee meetings and comment on various drafts as they were being considered. The committee's co-chair, Rafik Petrosyan, promised to allow CSICR access to any revised amendments before the second reading in parliament.

During the quarter, NDI helped IYC organize 46 educational meetings throughout Armenia to inform voters about the issues at stake in the referendum and the potential impact they might have on human rights and democratic freedoms. NDI and a staff attorney from ABA/CEELI helped IYC's leaders prepare for appearances on three television programs during which they discussed the content of the amendments and the referendum process in general.

Election Monitor Training-of-Trainers

In this quarter, NDI assisted IYC in implementing an advanced election monitoring training program for 160 of its top election monitors, a project funded by a grant from the British government. In April, NDI and IYC worked together to develop the curriculum and identify 160 IYC members who have the knowledge and experience necessary to become outstanding election monitor trainers. To provide them with training tools and skills, NDI and IYC designed a PowerPoint presentation, a training handbook and a booklet. In May, NDI and IYC recruited four experts on training election monitors from Croatia, Slovakia, Armenia, and Ukraine to conduct a series of training seminars for the IYC group.

In June, 160 IYC coordinators participated in training sessions aimed at providing advanced training techniques and the skills needed for effective long term monitoring, at reviewing election monitor codes of conduct, and working with large numbers of short term volunteers. During these sessions, NDI and IYC introduced a new election monitor training video that was produced by Bars Media. A second training video is currently in production.

IYC also organized a conference in June for all its election monitors to discuss the new electoral code. For the conference, IYC printed hundreds of copies of the new electoral code, which were distributed to the participants. Following the conference, the 160 IYC trainers began a second round of training sessions on local election monitoring that included a discussion of the new electoral code.

On June 8, IYC sent a group of these top monitors to observe a local election in the Malatia-Sebastia section of Yerevan. They reported instances of illegal campaigning, discrepancies on voter lists, violations to the electoral code by precinct election commissioners, intimidation of candidate proxies, and violations of law by the police. IYC issued a complete report, which is available on its website (www.iyc.am). Following the election, IYC held a press conference to announce its findings.

IYC Capacity Building

NDI helped IYC launch its website during the quarter (www.iyc.am), which makes its election monitor reports and advocacy materials available to the public. NDI advised IYC to retain the services of a webmaster responsible for updating the website on a regular basis. This advice prompted IYC to hire a fluent English speaker who will serve as both a translator and a webmaster. So that its new webmaster would become skilled in website design, maintenance and troubleshooting, IYC organized training sessions with an expert web technician.

Also in this quarter, NDI helped IYC move forward on establishing a board of directors. IYC prepared proposals on the composition of its board and how it would operate that will be discussed with its membership in July. IYC plans to select board members in August and hold its first board meeting in September.

V. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Objective 1: *Strengthen the capacity of parties to participate effectively in local elections*

As a result of NDI's advice and training, Armenia's main pro-government and opposition political parties undertook activities aimed at strengthening their organizations, building wider bases of support through constituent outreach, and improving their use of the media. The pro-governmental Legal State Party, in particular, acted on NDI's training to build branch offices, identify voters, and mobilize support. NDI's advice for opposition groups also resulted in the opening of branch offices to recruit new members. NDI media training resulted in opposition parties creating a press centers and developing plans to use direct mail. NDI helped two opposition groups influence the constitutional reform process by organizing a strategic planning session and suggesting ways to affect public opinion.

Objective 2: *Increase IYC's capacity to educate citizens and monitor proficiently the referendum and local election procedures*

NDI helped IYC train 160 of its most capable election monitors so that they are prepared to train upwards of 3,600 volunteer election monitors—two for each precinct in Armenia—ahead of local elections and the constitutional referendum. NDI's advice led to the development of a new training handbook, a monitor guidebook, and a training video produced with funding from the British government.

NDI helped IYC to draft a report of the local elections in Malatia Sebastia and compile a distribution list that included embassies, NGO allies, USAID, politicians, and other interested parties.

NDI helped IYC prepare to conduct long-term monitoring of the local elections and constitutional referendum by providing templates and models of monitor reports.

NDI's assistance to IYC led to educational television programs on the electoral code and the constitutional amendments. The programs each aired twice over national networks.

Objective 3: *Increase IYC's future sustainability*

With NDI assistance, IYC launched its website (www.iyc.am). The website allows for greater communication to IYC's members, activists, volunteers, and potential funders around the world.

NDI's encouragement and advice resulted in IYC reaching out to other Armenian organizations and participating in the Civil Society Initiative for Constitutional Reform initiative. This allowed IYC to significantly expand its contacts and identify potential allies for its other advocacy efforts.

NDI's assistance helped IYC obtain funding for the production of training materials, informational brochures and public service television and radio advertisements. These have increased IYC's ability to recruit and train new members, activists and volunteers. IYC's television appearances and the public service advertisements increased the organization's stature in Armenia.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

NDI plans to provide candidate training in advance of the local elections. In particular, the Institute will focus on the parties that have requested targeted training and training for women, such as the Legal State Party, the Dashnaks, and the PPA. Additionally, NDI will provide voter contact training to the Republic Party, the Dashnaks and Legal State. The Institute will meet with all its partner parties to discuss women's leadership and outreach programs to follow up the Global Action Plan, which was launched in June. NDI will conduct a training program for the People's Party of Armenia and the Union of Constitutional Rights Party on developing media strategies. A multiparty training on the Freedom of Information Act and conducting press conferences are planned for August.

Also in the next quarter, NDI will help IYC focus on defining the role of its board of directors, providing advice on the process of selecting members, and establishing procedures for board meetings. NDI will also help IYC follow up its voting and attendance records advocacy campaigns by helping IYC prepare a training program that educates NGO leaders on how to obtain and make use of the public records. This activity will be funded by the U.S. government through a Democracy Commission grant.